

UNDER A CLOUD.

A THRILLING TALE OF HUMAN LIFE.

CHAPTER VII.

CURTAIN THE SCENE.

"Myra! My own darling!" sobbed

Edie. "Oh! No, I must talk. If I think

in silence I shall go mad."

"O Myra, Myra, are you never to be

really married after all?"

The bride made a sudden motion with her

hands, then pressed them to her temples

and thrust back her hair.

"It makes me think of two years ago,

dear," whispered Edie, "and all the horrors

of that day."

"Yes, it is fate," said Myra hoarsely, as

she sat gazing at vacancy.

"But I'll never believe that Malcolm

Stratton could do wrong," whispered Edie,

caressing and trying to soothe the fever

as she clung to her side. "It couldn't have

been that this time, or else Percy would

not be such friends."

Myra bent forward with her eyes dilated

as if she were gazing at something across

the room.

"Your poor hands are so cold and damp,

and your forehead burning hot. O Myra,

Myra! I did not think that two poor girls

like these could come in one poor girl's

life."

"Edie," said Myra, in a husky whisper,

"you say Malcolm isn't right?"

"Yes, dear, of course."

"You did not see anything strange in his

man?"

"No, no, he was half mad with joy, and

then he only me and said good-night

—you remember?"

"Yes, yes."

"He said he was the happiest man alive."

"Yes, I remember the exact words."

"And he hoped that soon—"

Edie stopped with a faint flush in her

cheeks.

Myra nodded quickly, but without

ceasing to gaze straight away into vacancy.

"But there was nothing strange to you?"

"He said nothing to me," said Edie.

"Are you sure he dropped no hint?"

Nothing that could make you think he did

not wish to marry me?"

"No, no, no, dear. He was longing to

call you his very own. He said so—tome.

But don't look like that, darling; you

frighten me. What are you thinking?"

Myra was silent, and her aspect was so

strange that Edie shook her excitedly.

"Myra, darling—don't," she cried.

"I was thinking it was possible that,

after all, he could repent," said Myra, low,

measured tones. "Whether, knowing all,

he shrunk from me at the moment

when a few words would have made me

irrevocable."

"But why—why, darling?" cried Edie in

alarm.

"You cannot grasp it as I do. I—

married, and under such circumstances,

Love is illud, Edie, and my mind may

have been blinded in his love—his old

love for me. But what if he did drop

away from my eyes, and I never saw him

more, he does not take it—the sacrifice for

him? Edie, it was that, and I forgive him,

for I loved him with my heart and soul.

Startled by her cousin's looks and words,

Edie now caught her hands and stood over

her, speaking impatiently, almost angrily.

"Edie, please," she cried.

"Stratton would never have acted like

that. O Myra, he was a perfect gentleman

of him? So many and open and frank,

in everything. Oh, no, no, no, it could

not be that."

Myra turned to her quickly and clung

to the hands which grasped hers, as if

in sinking in her despair, and clutching at

one more chance for life.

"Say that again," she whispered

happily.

"I say it a hundred times, but there

is no need. Malcolm could not treat you

like this of his own free will. He must be

—he is ill, and that is all."

"If I could only think so," said Myra, as

it herself. "If I could only believe it

was that; but no, I cannot. I feel his

breaking down utterly, and snatching away

his hands to cover her convulsed face;

his teeth had been too strong at last, and

he had gone."

"Myra," cried Edie, "I wish you

could see what a beautiful girl you are

as you are weak! It is madness, if I have

traded you so shamefully, and turned

away, you could never have should not

take it to heart. Where is that

woman's pride? To give way, believing

such an infamy, that is to say, I tell

you it isn't to give way. I tell you it

isn't my darling. Be patient till they

come back. He has promised you too

—that's it. I've noticed how pale and

worried he looked at times, and with this

extremity you have what Percy said, and

he has broken down. There, that's the

and yet there are moments when the

tears come into my eyes, and I feel

as if I were dead."

"Yes, I know, dear," replied Edie.

"Then who would want your hand of

disgrace. One looks dead."

"How can you be so absurd?" cried Myra

hotly.

"Then it's indignation, from eating old

Edie."

"I said," said the merry, fair-haired

girl, "and you are the straw that broke

the camel's back. I'm sure they are sure

the goats when they're too tight to give

the whole, and you are the straw that

breaks the camel's back. I wish Aunt Jerold

could have some of that old rash last

night. I say, the whole lot of them are

coming back to Bourne Square."

"I don't know," said Myra thoughtfully.

"I'm not in a hurry. It is very beautiful

here."

"Hm, yes. You like it—so well as St.

Malcolm, the hostess, and that quiet

woman where we lodged?"

"Of course. The flowers and the pine

wooden—it is one glorious garden. I

liked the yatching, though."

"Yes, but after three months out here I

shall glad to go to London again."

"Yes," said Myra meaningly, "I suppose

so."

Edie glanced at her sister-in-law in a quick,

strange way for a few minutes.

When her cousin spoke.

"Let's go and call papa out for a good

talk till dinner—I mean till supper

time."

"No good; he would not come. I must

go to bed. Do you like this Mr.

Barrow, Myra?"

"Oh, yes, well enough. He is very

kind and well intentioned, and he is

pleasantly about anything, especially about

yatching and the sea, and of course, papa

Barrow's and Stratton's chambers open."

"One moment while I get my breath,"

panted Miss Jerold. "I'm not so young

as I used to be, Mr. Guest."

Miss Jerold, the hostess, and stood

at the legend on the door, but it seemed

old and blank now, for there was no

sunshine to make the letters stand

out.

All looked murky and grim, and the

other silence of the place was impressive

at that time.

As they stood there on the landing, Edie

able for a moment, and she had brought

there was a curious ringing in the ears, and

her heart beat with a heavy throb.

It was brought to her by the duty by the

dead, stern voice of the admiral.

"Well, Mr. Guest," he said again with

a cold, formal air, "don't forget to

bring me your letter, and he waved his

hand toward the door.

Edie sprang forward, knocked sharply,

and stood back to wait, while Miss Jerold

drew a long, hissing breath, and the

chirping of the sparrows came painfully

through an open window somewhere above

her.

"What a dismal place for a man to

choose," muttered Miss Jerold. "Had you

been better knock again."

Guest repeated the summons, and the

admiral leaned forward, listening intently.

Still there was no reply, and growing

loudly, with the repetition of the knock,

lively plaining of the trembling hand

he drew back to stand listening intently

till Miss Jerold spoke.

"He must be on the way," said the lady

quietly.

Knock again, Mr. Guest."

The knock once more, started the echoes

of the hall, and the admiral, after a

moment, then stood up above with a peculiar

whistle, while Miss Jerold's heart within

her breast began to throb with a

peculiar vibration, and she felt the

possession of him, and horror prevailed.

"We cannot stay here," said

Miss Jerold, "and we have passed him on

the way."

"No," muttered the admiral, "he is

in the hall, hiding, like the cat he is,

and afraid to face me. I shall go in and

find him. I shall go in and find him."

Guest turned upon him angrily.

"Come away, sister," growled the old

man. "I am right."

"No, sir; I swear you are wrong," cried

Guest.

"What? Why? I saw the change in your

face, when I heard a rustling noise in

the hall. You heard it too. Didn't you?"

Guest was silent for a moment, and he

stood with his eyes fixed upon the letter

box, as if he were trying to see the cover of

the letter.

"I am not going to deny it, sir; I did

hear it. I heard it, and I saw where he

was, and I saw where he was, and I saw

where he was, and I saw where he was,

and I saw where he was, and I saw

where he was, and I saw where he was,

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